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BENNETT SECURES FUNDS TO COMBAT MORMON CRICKET INFESTATION

Utah crop loss could exceed \$25 million this year

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senator Bob Bennett (R-Utah) today secured \$4 million to combat the infestation of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers in Utah which, if left unchecked, could cost the state tens of millions of dollars in crop losses next year.

“These funds will help avert an agricultural disaster for Utah farmers,” Bennett said.

The Senate Appropriations Committee today approved the Department of Agriculture Appropriations Bill for FY 2002 and included Bennett’s request for \$4 million for USDA’s Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) for its grasshopper and Mormon cricket control program in the West, the largest grant approved for this purpose since 1993.

Mormon crickets and grasshoppers reproduce on non-managed lands in Utah, and leave to feed on neighboring agricultural and grazing lands where crops and forage are significantly damaged from the infestation. The senator noted that last year over one million acres of land in Utah were infested with the insects causing damages in excess of \$22 million to the state’s agricultural producers. It is anticipated that the infestation will affect approximately 1.5 million acres of Utah land this year and cause a potential crop loss in excess of \$25 million. Lack of adequate funding in past years to address the problem, and the anticipated Mormon cricket and grasshopper population increase, will continue to pose a threat to Utah farmers.

The committee also approved the following requests of Bennett’s for other Utah agricultural programs:

- ***\$5.6 million to complete construction of the Poisonous Plant Research Laboratory at Logan, Utah***

Built in 1962, the Poisonous Plant Research Laboratory in Logan is the only one of its kind in the nation. Since its construction, the metal building has been expanded four times to meet increasing laboratory and office space needs. The cobbling together of these four additions has created a hodgepodge of inefficient heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems which is non-compliant with OSHA standards which require 100% fresh air in laboratories.

The agricultural industry, particularly the range livestock industry, is critically dependent upon research conducted at the Poisonous Plant Research lab. USDA estimates livestock losses from poisonous plants to range between \$300,000 and \$400,000 annually. This figure only includes confirmed death losses and does not include loss of productivity, infertility etc. in animals that become sick but do not die from poisoning.

- ***\$250,000 for Pasture and Forage Research at Utah State University***

Forage is the single most expensive cost in the cattle, dairy, horse, and sheep industries. Most of the land in Utah has a much higher forage production potential than is currently realized. An additional factor is that 70% of Utah land is federal land. Much of this is used by ranchers for grazing. However, given the continuing threat by the government to curtail grazing on these public lands and increasing grazing fees, it is critical that production on privately held lands increase. The integration of improved forage species and pasture management systems with enhanced animal productivity would result in a livestock production system that would maintain the livestock industry in Utah and reduce the potential negative results of federal land management efforts.

The bill now goes to the full Senate for its consideration. The House of Representatives passed its version of the bill last week which only included funds for the Pasture and Forage Research program.

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